

# epicenter



no. 3

inside  
this  
edition

director's message 2 | facility news 3 | recreational therapy service week 4  
recognizing margie lowe 5 | cover story 6 | inspiration 8 | walkway of honor 9  
va news 10 | employee news 11 | feedback 12

## I hope all of you are having a relaxing summer.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE all take time to take care of ourselves mentally, physically and emotionally. I encourage everyone to take part in our employee health and wellness programs, the Palo Alto Division Farmer's Market and other programs at other sites that encourage healthy living. We recently received the results of several employee surveys on our culture of patient safety and on employee satisfaction. It is very clear our terrific scores on both surveys correlate well to our equally terrific patient satisfaction scores. But beyond what the surveys say is the way we work and live with each other in our health care system and in our communities. We will be introducing new activities fostering "inclusiveness" over the coming weeks and months to help foster the feeling of connectedness that helps us to manage the pressures of our work and homes lives in a positive and productive manner.



*It is very clear our terrific scores on both surveys correlate well to our equally terrific patient satisfaction scores.*

Our summer at VAPAHCS is off to an exciting start. We were thrilled to host Secretary Shinseki on June 23, 2009. He first visited the Fisher House and met numerous patients and families and staff. He also met Rick Yount and patients participating in the Paws for Purple Hearts program; this is always a big hit, especially for a dog lover like the Secretary.

He met leadership from our Polytrauma and Spinal Cord Injury programs and toured the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. He met numerous staff, patients, families and our military liaisons. He received excellent briefings on our Vision Research, Advanced Imaging and Simulation programs. He listened intently and asked insightful questions. Everyone very much enjoyed the mutual exchanges. I want to thank all the staff who worked so hard to make this visit an amazing success.

On July 1, 2009, we hosted Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, Congressman Mike Honda and numerous other dignitaries for the groundbreaking for Building 520, our new Acute Inpatient Psychiatric Building. We have been in the planning stages for this project for a very long time; there have been numerous fits and starts, but at long last, the project is beginning. The result will be a state-of-the-art health care 80-bed acute inpatient psychiatric facility meticulously designed to provide a space for both clinical and spiritual healing.

The start of this and other projects will test the flexibility and adaptability of VAPAHCS with regard to parking. Much more information will be forthcoming as to how we will manage the months of moves and parking deficits. Our success in managing these challenges will require a great deal of patience on the part of all staff.

Lastly, we are again in the "window" for an announced Joint Commission Accreditation Survey. Our last survey occurred in March 2007 so we may be surveyed at any time. We have come to expect most surveys to be unannounced so our preparation for this survey has been continuous over the last 27 months. One new aspect to our next survey will be a full time "Environment of Care" surveyor as an additional survey team member. This means there will be an increased focus on environment of care issues and emergency preparedness issues in the survey "tracers" and in unscheduled interviews with staff at all levels. We will heighten our activities to ensure you are all confident and at ease when speaking with a surveyor.

Thanks again to everyone for the wonderful work you do every day.

**Lisa Freeman**  
*Director*



## New VA Outpatient Clinic to Open in East Bay

**The 45,000 Veterans** who live in the East Bay between San Lorenzo and Fremont are one step closer to having Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical and mental health care services in their backyard. The VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) recently signed a lease in Fremont to open a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

"We are very pleased to be able to offer Veterans in the East Bay clinical services, which up until now they had to get at either our Livermore or Palo Alto Divisions," said Lisa Freeman, VAPAHCS director. "The new clinic will offer primary care and mental health services. If all goes as planned, we hope to have it open in January 2010."

The new, 10,000 square-foot leased clinic in Fremont is a development property owned by Smithfield Medical Development. VAPAHCS underwent a competitive bidding process to determine the final location of the property. The building, located at 39191-39217 Liberty Street, Fremont, will be renovated and modernized before the clinic opens.

"This clinic precedes the development of a large, multi-specialty clinic somewhere in the East Bay approximately five years down the road," said Freeman. "However, we didn't want to wait until 2015 to provide East Bay Veterans local health care. Consequently, we are opening an interim clinic until the new, larger East Bay clinic can be built. The location of the multi-specialty clinic is pending."

Additionally, VAPAHCS is looking

to expand the clinics in Stockton and Modesto. Again, this will serve as an interim step, until the new Central Valley clinic opens in approximately 2015. This interim expansion aims to bring some rehabilitation services and more mental health services to these sites. It is hoped that both expansions will be completed in 2010.

Meanwhile, VAPAHCS will continue to operate, maintain and upgrade buildings and services at the Livermore Division until the new multi-specialty facilities in the East Bay and Central Valley are complete.

"All of this is very positive news for Veterans in the East Bay and Central Valley. Services will significantly increase and provide modern, up-to-date facilities. No services will be cut, in fact, more Veterans will have access to more services than ever before," said Freeman. ▲

## Congresswoman Eshoo and Congressman Honda Help Break Ground for VAPAHCS New Mental Health Center

**Congresswoman Anna Eshoo and Congressman Mike Honda** joined more than 200 VA staff and Veterans for the Ground Breaking Ceremony for the New Mental Health Center, July 1.

The new Center will house four units, each with 20 inpatient acute psychiatric beds, for a total of 80 beds. The project also includes outdoor enclosed gardens for the patients, a separate mental health research and office pavilion and a utility building to service the complex. The total building area will be at least 76,000 square feet of interior space. Most rooms are private, with some semi-private, and all have private bathrooms.

The building's therapeutic design and healing environments were the result of collaboration with clinicians and will be implemented throughout the project. The building will include patient access to landscaped gardens, ample use of natural light to all internal patient and staff areas, views to landscaped areas from all patient bedrooms, color, texture and material palettes selected to aid in the healing process.

This project will enable VAPAHCS to consolidate all



*Congresswoman Eshoo, Congressman Honda, VAPAHCS leadership and staff and community partners break ground for the new Mental Health Center at the Palo Alto Division.*

inpatient mental health beds into one center. Currently, VAPAHCS operates four acute inpatient mental health units on two campuses in three separate buildings.

The current inpatient mental health unit at the Palo Alto Division will remain operational throughout the construction of the new Mental Health Center, which is anticipated to be completed in two years. Following the completion of the new Center, Building 2 will be torn down. ▲

# VAPAHCS Celebrates Recreation Therapy Service Week!

**Recreation Therapy Service** is celebrated nationally from July 13-18, providing an opportunity to share the mission and benefits of Recreation Therapy and discuss the unique role of Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists (CTRS) throughout our entire health care system.

Therapeutic Recreation (TR) is a specialized process utilizing recreation and leisure to achieve specific desired outcomes. The primary purpose of Recreation Therapy is to restore, remediate or rehabilitate individuals holistically in each of the following domains: cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual

Restoration, remediation and rehabilitation are accomplished by using specific TR modalities designed to improve function, independence, enhance health, reduce or eliminate the effects of illness or disability by promoting independence and quality of life. Therapeutic Recreation is provided by professionals who are

trained and certified, registered and/or licensed to provide Therapeutic Recreation. (©ATRA, 1986)

Leisure Coaching is the process of discovering what a person would like to do and working with them to identify and overcome potential obstacles. Community Reintegration is the process of becoming an integral part of one's community; physically, socially and mentally.

An important part of the Recreation Therapist's role is to help create an atmosphere where Veterans (and often their families) feel at ease to share their thoughts, ideas, and preferences, which in turn supports the goal of social interactions.

Recreation Therapists consistently evaluate their respective programs and continue to make adjustments in order to provide best practices with the unified goal of holistically treating Veterans.

RTs monitor and evaluate the services provided by taking outcome measures in the following ways:

- Increase relaxation/stress reduction
- Improve communication skills
- Improve coping skills/social skills
- Decrease anxiety
- Increase self-esteem
- Expand leisure knowledge and increase awareness of self in leisure
- Learn recreational activities
- Increase tolerance
- Increase physical functioning
- Improve eye-hand coordination
- Maintain self-care
- Normalization
- Increase inclusion into the community/reintegration into the community
- Promote competition
- Improve choice making and self-initiated behavior



If you would like more information about Recreation Therapy, please visit our website on the VAPAwab:  
<http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/hcservices/RecreationTherapy.asp>.



Santa Clara County  
Friend of the  
Veteran Award Presented  
to VAPAHCS Volunteer

# Margie Lowe

CONGRATULATIONS TO VAPAHCS Volunteer, Mrs. Margie Lowe, recipient of the 2009 Santa Clara County, Friend of the Veteran Award. Mrs. Lowe has volunteered three to five days each week at the San Jose VA Adult Day Health/Day Respite (ADHC) Program, since 1997. Mrs. Lowe has logged thousands of volunteer hours for this program, which serves frail elderly Veterans who have dementia or other debilitating conditions.



VAPAHCS Volunteer  
Margie Lowe

Mrs. Lowe is the widow of a Veteran who suffered from Alzheimer's whom she cared for at home until his passing. During that time, she acquired a great deal of knowledge and skill in the care of dementia patients. She expressed the wish to volunteer in the VA day program to brighten the days and lift the spirits of our ADHC/Day Respite Veterans.

Mrs. Lowe is loved and appreciated by the ADHC/Day Respite

Veterans. "Margie offers a smile and gentle encouragement to the Veterans every day she is present," said Karen Brown, Day Respite/Adult Day Health Program Director. She serves Veterans coffee and makes special, healthy treats for them and even cuts up fresh fruit in bite-sized pieces so the Veterans can easily eat them, said Brown.

Mrs. Lowe has taken Tai Chi classes at a local senior center. She found the movements to be therapeutic for her, and now teaches Tai Chi to our elderly Veterans a few times each week. It is magical to see her lead this group as they watch her and follow her gentle, graceful movements.

Mrs. Lowe has accompanied our Adult Day Health/Day Respite group on many recreational outings. These activities are hard work, making sure the Veterans are safe and comfortable and have their needs met during the outing. When the staff and Veterans thank her for her help, she always says, "I love to see the Veterans enjoy themselves".

According to Brown, Mrs. Lowe has mentored many volunteers, helping them enroll in VA Voluntary Service and Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). She teaches them about our patients' needs, and about VA rules and regulations. In addition, Mrs. Lowe was a key figure in organizing the annual San Jose Clinic "Country Store," from 1997-2007, which raised thousands of dollars for the benefit of the San Jose VA Clinic patients, stated Brown.

Mrs. Lowe is a lifetime member of the VFW Auxiliary and Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary. She is also a member of RSVP. Mrs. Lowe has a deep patriotism and is very proud to fly the American Flag every day at her home. Margie's kind, generous, and patriotic spirit inspires us daily and we are thankful for her dedication to our Veterans, noted Brown. ▲

VAPAHCS Director  
Lisa Freeman escorts  
VA Secretary Eric Shinseki  
on his first visit to the  
Palo Alto Division.



# VA Secretary Shinseki visits VA Palo Alto H

Sergeant Michael Liston, a Marine  
of the Palo Alto Detachment, Wounded  
Warrior Battalion West briefs Secretary  
Shinseki on the meaning of each tattoo.



**VA SECRETARY ERIC K. SHINSEKI** visited the VA Palo Alto Division on June 23, 2009. It was the first visit for the former Army chief of staff and retired Army Four-Star General.

**He began his visit at the Fisher House** and met numerous patients, families and staff. He also met Rick Yount, Paws for Purple Hearts program director, and the patients participating in the training program. The VA pilot program is always a big hit, especially for a dog lover like the Secretary.



Secretary Shinseki listens to feedback from a Fisher House family member.



VAPAHCS staff, Paws For Purple Heart Program Director and Veteran trainers pose with the first official VA service dogs in training in front of the Fisher House during Secretary Shinseki's visit to Palo Alto.



Secretary Shinseki receives a quick "101" lesson on Guitar Hero therapy from a poly-trauma patient and recreation therapist.





VA Secretary Eric Shinseki poses with VAPAHCS Military Liaisons during his visit to Palo Alto.



# Health Care System

The Secretary met leadership from the Polytrauma and Spinal Cord Injury programs and toured the Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. He met numerous staff, patients, families and our military liaisons. He even watched while one of our Polytrauma patients was coached on the use of *Guitar Hero* and was interested in knowing the progress of the patient's recreation therapy activity... perhaps even considering some *Guitar Hero* therapy of his own.

Serious to his commitment to listen to and address concerns of patients, the Secretary spent almost an hour with various patients in a closed-door session, which was very difficult for him to draw away from since he was very intent on receiving feedback from every patient—on everything from their military service, health care experiences to the origins of their tattoos!

The Secretary received excellent briefings on VAPAHCS Vision Research, Advanced Imaging and Simulation programs. He listened intently, asked terrific questions and engaged in meaningful dialogue with staff.

Another highlight of the visit was a

presentation to the Secretary from Scott Skiles, Polytrauma Supervisory Social Worker, who presented a sculpture to Secretary Shinseki of a Soldier kneeling before a wall inscribed with the words of Abraham Lincoln.

“My first goal is looking after these Veterans, and the second goal is making sure you have the resources you need to care for them.”

Since his nomination, Secretary Shinseki pledged to move quickly in addressing the existing, impending and projected health care needs of our Veterans by focusing on VA funding and a budget with a strategic plan to expand care to Veterans, where they need it most.

“I am new to VA and had a big learning curve,” the Secretary noted, “but I know a lot more today than I did six months ago. I take my hat off to the clinical staff and military here today, and I just want to say ‘thanks’ for all you do to care for our Veterans.”

“I have two goals as Secretary,” Shinseki added, “The first one is looking after these Veterans [and he smiled referring to the patients in front of him], and the second goal is making sure you have the resources you need to care for them.” ▲



During his tour of the Palo Alto Fisher House, Secretary Shinseki visits with WWII Veterans.

Photo by Curt Campbell, VAPAHCS



*Chris Downey, architect with SmithGroup, meets with staff at the VA's Western Blind Rehabilitation Center to discuss plans for the new center. Because he is blind himself, Downey feels his contributions are a significant help in designing a building for blind Veterans.*

said Katelin Haver, VAPAHCS facility planner. "He is able to use his disability to assist the design team in creating a building that serves the special needs of vision-impaired Veterans. His involvement in the design process has helped to create an excellent new building for Veterans."

Prior to working on this project, Downey was trying to figure out how he could stay in the profession of architecture by finding some tools, technologies, or tasks that would let him work around his blindness. "That was a real head scratcher, in the way of precedence in the architectural world," he said.

"Now I feel like I have the opportunity to work because of my blindness," Downey said. "My disability is leading me into an architectural experience that is totally focused on helping others. Oddly enough, I'm quite confident that I'll end up having a greater architectural impact than I ever

# BLIND ARCHITECT BUILDS FOR THE BLIND

**It looked like any normal meeting** between architectural consultants and VA clinicians to discuss how to build a new blind rehabilitation center at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS) – except sitting at one end of the table was an architect with a white cane who looked more like the patients he was working for than a consultant.

Fifteen months ago, Chris Downey was just another architect from Oakland. Then he developed a benign tumor that slowly encircled the intersection of optic nerves. The tumor began to push the nerves out of position. His eyeballs looked fine, but an MRI revealed a golf-ball size growth causing blind spots. After extensive surgery and many hopeful days and months, he eventually lost all sight.

He accepted blindness right away. What he could not accept was being told he needed to look for a new career.

"For architects, being blind is incredibly foreign because the profession is so visually grounded and focused in its techniques

and in its imagination," said Downey. "But I learned of a blind architect in Portugal and that was all I needed to know."

His previous firm fired Downey, but SmithGroup, which was doing a joint venture with Design Partnerships, brought him on to help design a 170,000-square-foot Polytrauma and Blind Rehabilitation Center for the VAPAHCS.

"Chris Downing has brought a unique perspective to the building design process,"

*Chris Downey, architect with SmithGroup, walks around the exterior of the VA Palo Alto's current Western Blind Rehabilitation Center with Tim Langford, Chief of the Western Blind Rehabilitation Center.*

could have imagined in my prior practice.

"It's not easy and I have a long way to go, but the chance to work on VA's Western Blind Rehabilitation Center has opened the door to the meaningful career that I always wanted and aspired to." ▲



Photo by Curt Campbell, VAPAHCS



Engraved Bricks: **\$40**  
Rose Memorial Plaques: **\$50**

**For information contact:**  
Jerry Georgette, R.N., at ext. 64073

VAPAHCS Invites You to Participate In the

# Walkway of Honor

THE BEAUTIFUL AND POPULAR Memorial Rose Garden, located just outside our VAPAHCS Palo Alto Chapel, was developed throughout the last few years, almost solely by donations of materials and labor.

VAPAHCS is very grateful to those who have been so generous with their time and contributions. In recent months, the garden pathways have been beautifully paved with bricks and other items donated by Peninsula Building Materials and installation labor contributed by Jack Stringer, owner of Aero Drywall, Inc. The garden has become a wonderful place for staff, patients, visiting family and friends to escape for quiet time, reflection and meditation.

Currently a lasting legacy program was developed to turn the brick pathways into a **Walkway of Honor** by allowing anyone to purchase an engraved brick for \$40. All the net profits from this program will be used for garden maintenance and improvements and all donations are tax deductible.

If you would like to be a *permanent* part of this marvelous garden, please fill out the form included in this issue of Epicenter and return it to the Voluntary Service Department in Building 100. Keep in mind these engraved bricks can be in memory of a loved one or in honor of someone special in your life and need not be connected to the military. Don Jackson, Volunteer Coordinator who is spearheading this project, relayed that "there are also a few roses left that can have a Memorial Plaque placed for \$50." Mr. Jackson added, "Anyone wishing to help maintain the garden, please contact Jerry Georgette, R.N., our Lead Gardener Volunteer at extension 64073,"

Mr. Jackson applauded Jerry and his crew for doing a wonderful job. He mentioned they can always use extra help. "Any monetary or labor contributions for this awe-inspiring Memorial Rose Garden are always most appreciated," said Jackson. ▲



## I wish to purchase...

\_\_\_\_\_ Memorial Plaque(s) at \$50 or

\_\_\_\_\_ Brick(s) at \$40 each.

I have enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I do not want to purchase a Memorial Plaque or a Brick, but wish to make a donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support the garden.

I would like the following inscription on the plaque or brick (3 lines each plaque or brick; 19 letters/spaces per line):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Purchaser's  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please return this form and your check to:*

VA Palo Alto Health Care System  
3801 Miranda Ave.  
Palo Alto, CA 94304  
Attention: Voluntary Service

To contribute, please use this form, or see the complete brochure online at:  
[http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/docs/PA\\_Rose\\_Garden\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/docs/PA_Rose_Garden_Brochure.pdf)

## Veterans Canteen Service Announces Trans Fat Free Cooking

DID YOU KNOW that the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS) uses trans fat free cooking oils and spreads to prepare foods nationwide?

Trans fats are created when hydrogen is added to liquid vegetable oils. Consumption of trans fats raises bad cholesterol (LDL) and lowers healthy cholesterol (HDL) leading to an increased risk for heart disease and stroke. The VCS has been using trans fat free cooking oils for several years and recently switched all margarine products to trans fat free spreads in an effort to eliminate trans fats from the cooking process.

According to Jonathan Fagman, VAPAHCS Assistant Canteen Chief, the Canteen deep fries in trans fat free oil and uses Smart Balance butter for all recipes. There is little to no taste difference in the final product and our customers enjoy much healthier food as a result.

The VCS is working to eliminate pre-processed food items containing trans fat to achieve the goal of trans fat free VCS facilities by 2010. ▼

Veterans Canteen Service provides nutrition information for a variety of foods at these Web addresses:

<http://vaww.vcscanteen.aac.va.gov/NutritionalInfo.asp>

<http://www.vacanteen.va.gov/NutritionalInfo.php>

Are you interested in diversity?

Want to be a part of a Special emphasis program?

Do you need help resolving a conflict?

Contact your EEO Office to learn more:

**Beth Stovall** | EEO Program Manager, ext. 65113

**Bryan Ford** | EEO Specialist, ext. 67584

**Tracy Marino** | EEO Staff Assistance, ext. 62116

## VA Rated the 12th Best Place to Work in the Federal Government

IN THE BEST PLACES TO WORK rankings released last month by The Partnership for Public Service and American University's Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation, VA was rated the 12th best place to work in federal government.

The study, conducted every two years, is based on data collected through the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Human Capital Survey, which draws responses from more than 212,000 civil servants to produce detailed rankings of employee satisfaction and commitment across 279 federal agencies and subcomponents.

In the 2009 report, VA increased its overall score from 2007 by 6.6 percent, making it the fourth most-improved agency on the list. VA excelled in several categories including matching employee skills to the mission, strategic management, and training and development. VA also scored very high in diversity. Women, African Americans and multi-racial employees scored the agency in their top-10 places to work.

Employee satisfaction and commitment are two necessary ingredients in developing high-performing organizations. The Best Places rankings offer information about what factors drive employee commitment and satisfaction, enabling managers and leaders to take concrete action to improve their agency. VA's lowest scores were in the Effective Leadership – Supervisors category and the Pay and Benefits category even though it improved its scores in both. ▲





# epicenter

NEWSLETTER OF THE VA PALO  
ALTO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

2009

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## EPICENTER

is published for staff and patients  
of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System.

We welcome any comments,  
suggestions or story ideas  
you may have; please contact  
Patricia Matthews (00P)  
at 650-849-1222 or via email at  
patricia.matthews1@va.gov

Editor  
Patricia Teran-Matthews

Contributors  
Kerri Childress  
VOLUNTEER Thomas Dehaan  
VAPAHCS DIRECTOR Lisa Freeman  
Robert Homer  
VETERAN VOLUNTEER Donald Jackson

Photographer  
Curt Campbell

Design & Layout  
Rodney E. Boyce  
SQUARE PEG DESIGN



3801 Miranda Avenue

Palo Alto, CA 94304

650-493-5000

www.palo-alto.med.va.gov

## Service Awards

### April 2009

**25 years**

Jamil Bashir	Domiciliary Care
Natividad Beckner	Nursing
Elizabeth Cachola	Fiscal
Elmer Caro	Prosthetics & Sensory Aids
Glenn Cockerham	Surgical
Sandra Johnson	Nutrition & Food
Gloria Natividad	Nursing
Bruce Nothstein	A&MMS

**30 years**

Walter Avery	Engineering
Marilyn Burton	Nursing

**35 years**

Ray Hernandez	Research
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**40 years**

Judith Thielen	Ambulatory Care
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### May 2009

**25 years**

Sandra Gilbert	Nursing-Ambulatory Care
Moti Sahdeo	Fiscal
Paula Sheehan	OI&T
Wesley Skelton	Engineering
Lewis Williamson	Business Office

**30 years**

Alice Garvin	Business Office
Barbara Granfors	Nursing - Mental Health
Sandra Kemp	Human Resources
Virginia Rouse	Nursing - Mental Health
Bill Wong	Nursing - Mental Health
Elaine Wong	Human Resources

**35 years**

Lillie Hall	Medical
Betty Sidlinger	Blind Rehab

**40 years**

Robert Carrera	Engineering
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### June 2009

**25 years**

Robert Jenkins	Psychology
Philip Lewis	Engineering
Michael MacDonald	Domiciliary Care
Frاند Martin	Engineering
Felicia Park	Nursing - Ambulatory Care

**30 years**

Gary Churchill	Engineering
Robert Finn	Engineering
Jeffrey Grant	A&MMS
Ernestine Noguera	Nutrition & Food
Dorothy Whelan	Nursing

**35 years**

Louella Fernando	Nursing - Medical/Surgical
Robert Sundin	Engineering

## Retirees congratulations!

### March 2009

Jon Kosek	Path & Lab	yrs	52
Joanne Wise	Chief of Staff		12

### April 2009

Suzanne Doyle	Nursing	yrs	20
M.J. Friedrich-Sanders	Social Work		29
Thomas Mazurczak	Nutrition & Food		21
Conrad Rougeux	Chaplain		26

### May 2009

Ronald Bennett Jr.	A&MMS	yrs	12
Ronald Brandt	Medical		33
Jennifer Foster	Nursing		34
Scott Johnson	Blind Rehab		33
Gloria Kuhlman	Nursing		2
Patricia Mutts	Nursing		10
Marcus Nevarez	Nuclear Medicine		15
Gary Paige	Nursing		30
Dora Singletary	Nursing		19
Thomas Snell	Nursing		26

# you make a difference

I HAVE BEEN a spinal cord injury patient for several years, and I'm so impressed with the care that I receive.



Like many others, I was unsure about coming into the system. That concern has long passed; in fact, I often help vets in civilian hospitals make the transition.

**Greg Rosales** runs the wheelchair shop, and I have to think that Greg really loves his job. I say

this because when I have a need involving my wheelchair Greg takes immediate action and always does what he says he is going to do. Greg is a real asset to me and I'm sure to the whole system.

Thanks to Greg and thanks for making me feel like family when I'm at the Palo Alto facility. I could write reams about the care I receive in the Spinal Cord Injury unit. **Dr. Ota, Margaret, Susan, Christina** and **Al** treat me like I'm their only patient. I'm so blessed to have served my country and now have this wonderful care. —**A Veteran Patient**

THIS IS A LETTER of appreciation for **Ms. Karen Kapolnek**, a speech pathologist with VAPAHCS. About six



years ago, Ms. Kapolnek taught me speech reading. There was a lot to learn. Being hearing challenged, it was a great boon to me to be able to communicate my thoughts and understand more of other people's thoughts with speech reading. Most lay people have no idea what speech

reading is. I didn't. I thought it was lip reading, but it's so much more. Karen did a great job six years ago and a recent refresher course, fine tuning she calls it, is helping me "hear" more and do a better job. Thank you for allowing this vet to help others. —**A Veteran**

THE PURPOSE OF THIS LETTER is to formally commend **Virginia Thai**, orthopedic health technician at VA Palo Alto for the excellent service she provided before, during and after my shoulder replacement surgery. She went the extra mile to ensure that I had all the information about my surgery, directions to the hospital and a place to stay. If I had any questions she always called me back with helpful answers.



What particularly impressed me was when I called about my state disability and found out that nothing was done about filing them, Virginia personally took my papers and had them filled out and mailed. In an era where good phone communications are virtually nonexistent and totally frustrating, she furnished exceptional service and got the job done. —**A Veteran**

THIS LETTER REFERS TO a recent mental health intake evaluation conducted by **Diane Matthews**, LCSW,



clinical social worker. It was an absolute pleasure to have had this very efficient social worker do my assessment. She took the time, energy, and effort to get to know me and evaluated me comprehensively, while offering as much support as time allowed. Ms. Matthews' experience, expertise, and sincerity allowed me to openly share myself, thus allowing her to accurately assess. Her knowledge was expansive, and I knew half way through the evaluation just what I needed to do in order to get healthy. I felt very comfortable with her and feel so grateful at the quality of service she offered me. —**A Grateful Veteran**